

Andy Eicher, West Hartford resident and student at Conard High School
March 14, 2012 Judiciary Committee Public Hearing
Testimony in favor of SB 280, An Act Revising the Penalty for Capital Felonies:

Before I begin I would like to thank the committee for allowing me to speak in support of Senate Bill 280, An Act Revising the Penalty for Capital Felonies.

I am Andrew Eichar, and I am an 18 year old Senior at Conard High School in West Hartford. I am here to provide the thoughts of my generation about the death penalty and our concern about executing someone who is innocent.

Since 1973, 140 people have been exonerated from death row across this nation, due to their innocence. It is possible to make a horrible mistake like this in Connecticut. In the past 5 years, four individuals have been found innocent after being convicted of rape and murder and sentenced to long prison terms. At the national level, the risk of executing an innocent person became clear to my generation after the execution of Troy Davis last September in Georgia. Even though Troy Davis was never proven innocent of the crime he committed, the evidence that he was convicted with was clearly either biased or flat out false. When I talked to my classmates about the issue not a single person was in opposition of either acquitting Davis of the crime, or at least taking an even greater probe into the facts of the crime and the trial. Sadly, the decision was not reversed in this case and Troy Davis was executed.

DNA has proven that we've made mistakes and sentenced innocent people to death, but we can't rely on DNA to catch all of our mistakes because it's only available in a small percentage of murder cases. With all of the advances in technology, evidence rises that proves the innocence of the accused, but if this evidence is found after the accused has been executed it is too late, and my generation is beginning to realize this sad fact. Because there is always the possibility of new evidence rising, then how can we as a people justify the execution of a person to whom this new evidence may pertain, where if life imprisonment without the possibility of release was imposed, then there would be an opportunity for new evidence to arise.

One of the greatest threats to innocence is the fact that the convictions can be biased, this bias can stem from many things but the overarching bias is race. According to Amnesty International, about 50% of murder victims are white, with the other 50% being a minority, but 77% of the prisoners on death row are there because of being accused of killing a white victim. This percentage proves that the system is racially biased, and we must ensure that this racial bias does not lead to executions.

I am just starting to live my adult life and I want to ensure that not only my right to innocence is upheld, but also the rights of all the people that surround me; and I do not want to live in a state where my innocence may be impeded by the use of the death penalty. I do not want to live in a state that risks taking innocent lives in my name.

As a race, humans make mistakes, and these mistakes can convict persons of crimes they did not commit, but as a society we must ensure that none of these mistakes result in anyone losing their life. Thank you again for allowing me to speak, and please pass Senate Bill 280.

Thank you.